Brilliant Ideas Episode #38: Do Ho Suh

Creator who constructs floating space
Flexible space

A house was set up in the exhibition space. Everything including the furniture, rooms, and toilet used by the resident remained intact in the house. The house made of translucent cloth is not only in an overwhelming scale but also considerably detailed, With the Korean traditional house where he had

He built the houses where he lived in L.A., New York, and Berlin using soft and light cloth, in contrast to the hard and white walls of the exhibition spaces, Brilliant Ideas Episode #38, presented by Bloomberg and Hyundai Motor, features Do Ho Suh, one of the representative Korean contemporary
lived recreated with thin silk, Do Ho Suh became famous in the international art scene.

Korean houses, Western houses

Having majored in Korean painting in Korea, Do Ho Suh went to the U.S. to study art in 1991. Staying overseas for more than 10 years studying abroad, he came across different cultures and experienced various collisions resulting from differences between individuals, cultures, and regions. In particular, he found the greatest differences in houses, which revealed the way of life and identity of the residents. This realization changed the artist's perception of private spaces. He felt that it was interesting to experience the change of perception caused by such recognition of the differences. The artist embodied the sense of substantial distance along with the physical yet psychological distance between Korea and America in his artworks. He presented artworks created by measuring every part of the house he lived in and constructing an elaborate model of the house with cloth. The artist delicately reproduced the items in the house such as doorknobs, sockets, and switches. The exquisite and acute description which reflected the artist's unique personality resulted from his sentimental yet temperate way of viewing the world. Thus the House projects, his most representative works, were launched.

He used cloth because it is light and easy to move, transforming the building established with hard and heavy materials into a soft and light non-material piece. Do Ho Suh does not confine the houses in the material world but expands them into the immaterial world. The creation of the house that can be moved anywhere was realized in <Seoul Home/L.A. Home>(1999) displayed at the Korean Cultural Center in Los Angeles. He recreated the Korean traditional house in Korea where he had lived with thin silk. As various
The colors and lights that can be seen from his works are based on the Korean traditional culture. Such cultural elements are not only represented in the works in the form of the Korean traditional house but reside deeply in his aesthetic sense. Meanwhile, the delicate colors that ooze even solemnity are also important features of his artworks. He often uses jade green or celadon, inspired by the paper pasted on the ceiling of the Korean traditional houses. The walls of the traditional houses are usually pasted with white paper while the ceiling is applied with sky-blue or celadon paper, which stands for the heaven or universe. It was for the scholars living in the houses to think about wider spaces such as the universe while studying. The transparency of his artworks is based on ‘changhoji’, semi-transparent paper used for the doors and windows of the traditional houses. On such traditional contexts were used the sophisticated and delicate colors and textures of Do Ho Suh’s works.

Shift from an individual to others

The artworks of Do Ho Suh capture the Korean tradition and sentiments while representing the houses in different countries in which he actually lived, employing the concept of space and home as their subjects, to which people all around the world can relate. Having shown a consistent interest in space, he approaches the subject of “house” with various ideas and liberal ways without being confined to anything including generations, space, and the actual places. In addition to the replicas of the houses where he had resided in various regions, he also presented various site-specific installation projects such as ‘Fallen Star-1/5th Scale’(2008-2011), where the artist expressed the emotions he had as a foreigner while studying in the U.S. in the form of the Korean traditional house falling down and colliding with the American house.
Through these projects, Do Ho Suh’s houses become the borders and channels which divide and connect different cultures and individuals. Through his works, the artist studies the relationship between individuality, collectivity, and anonymity. Exploring subjects including karma, relationships, and space, he seeks the boundary of private spaces, the self, and identities, raising intriguing agendas.

To Do Ho Suh, houses always stayed at the same place, and he had to move from one to another. In his artworks, however, the houses became movable. The house floating freely in the air at the exhibition space is definitely a private space; the artist’s houses react with the exhibition place to draw new interpretations. Then, met with experiences and memories of the viewers, the houses are constantly reborn into the place of others. His works open possibilities for attachment of various meanings and interpretations, creating a new relationship. Different connections and interactions made during the process of the artist creating artworks and the viewers encountering them in the exhibition space also add other meanings to his works.

Travelling back and forth between the contrasting elements such as I and others, the past and the future, imaginations and reality, individuals and groups, and the East and the West in a balanced manner, Do Ho Suh reconstructs such elements through his artworks. The spaces he created are also a collective history that consists of memories of individuals. As an artist, Do Ho Suh completed the role of demonstrating the collision and confrontation between cultures and individuals in new environments while achieving mergence and fusion. ■ with ARTINPOST
Installation view of <Do Ho Suh: Passage> at the Contemporary Arts Center

Courtesy the Contemporary Arts Center, © Tony Walsh,
Do Ho Suh may be said to be living as a nomad. He works with the places he stayed in, including London, New York and Seoul where he was born. To capture flexibility in the place between physical and metaphorical manifestations, he uses thin cloths. The completed Suh’s house includes not only the space he lived in but questions about the relationship among individuals, communities, and anonymity.

Do Ho Suh was born in Seoul, in 1962. He studied various disciplines - Korean painting at Seoul National University, painting at Rhode Island School of Design and sculpture at Yale University. He has had several solo exhibitions including exhibitions at the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Korea (MMCA), the Lehmann Maupin gallery, the Museum of Modern Art, New York (MoMA), MoMA PS1, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Additionally he has participated in the ‘Venice Biennale’ and he was awarded the Hermes Foundation Missulsang.